

ABSTRACT

A Method for Interpreting Continental and Analytic Epistemology. (1999)

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Current investigations in epistemology tend to follow either the continental or the analytic school of thought. These schools of thought have different goals for epistemology and different procedures for achieving these goals. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the feasibility and profitability of communication between analytic and continental philosophy in epistemology. Wittgenstein's concept of language games will be used to frame the issue; continental and analytic philosophers play different language games. One can successfully interpret a particular language game from the perspective of another language game using the principle of charity. Specifically, the principle of charity allows analytic and continental epistemologists to communicate profitably.

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A METHOD FOR INTERPRETING
CONTINENTAL AND ANALYTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
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Major Subject: Philosophy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Current investigations in epistemology tend to follow either the continental or the analytic school of thought. These schools of thought have different goals for epistemology and different procedures for achieving these goals.

Keith Lehrer describes the epistemological goal of an analytic philosopher as “a philosopher might be concerned with precisely the question of what conditions are necessary and sufficient for a person to have knowledge, or more precisely, to know that *p*” (6). An analytic philosopher accomplishes this goal through “argument and definition turned by examples” (Lehrer xii).

Continental philosophers, on the other hand, do not want to justify claims like that *p*; they want to understand how entire vocabularies are legitimized. They focus not on justification for an individual, but, as Jean-Francois Lyotard puts it, on the “condition of knowledge” in a society, particularly the one that exists today (xiii). Their technique involves tracing the history of the subject, analyzing current conditions, and suggesting a new conception of knowledge.

This thesis follows the style and format of the MLA handbook.

This investigation need not advance by means of argument. As Richard Rorty suggests, epistemologists may proceed by making their conception “look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics” (8).

These differences do not mean the analytic and continental schools have nothing to say to each other. Not only can the schools talk to each other, they can benefit from it.

I will frame the issue using the concept of language games described by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations. The definition of a language game is complicated, since “these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,--but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language’” (31). This leads Wittgenstein to compare the relationships between games to relationship in a family: “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’... ‘games’ form a family” (32).

We cannot explain a game by describing the general characteristics of a game. The best way to explain a game is to point out various examples of it. “My concept of a game [is] completely expressed . . . in my describing examples of various kinds of game” (35). Although there are no boundaries intrinsic to language games in themselves, “we can draw a boundary—for a special purpose” (33). For example, we can draw a boundary to circumscribe certain types of knowledge games.

Certain of Wittgenstein's suggested uses of language games are useful for this project. Language games can be used as "*objects of comparison*" (51). Examining the similarities and dissimilarities in the epistemological games increases our understanding of those kinds of games. When we make comparisons, however, we must take care not to forget that the objects of comparison are different games with different rules. A sentence in one game cannot be evaluated in another game without interpretation.

Language games can also be used to allow us to talk about various ideas without assuming that one of them must be right or that the ideas are even in competition. This is important for this project because it is concerned with communication between theories, with collaboration rather than competition.

There are many different language games for many different purposes. I'm interested in the type of language game used to talk about knowledge. Although we sometimes talk as though there is only one game of this type, there are actually several such games with different goals and different rules. "We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike" (224). I will talk about analytic and continental epistemology as belonging to two different families of language games.

Because we explain games by giving examples, I will present two examples of both families of epistemology. The analytic family of games is represented here by the coherence theory presented in Theory of Knowledge, by Keith Lehrer, and

by subjective foundationalism found in The Theory of Epistemic Rationality, by Richard Foley. The continental family of games is described by The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, and by contingency, irony, and solidarity, by Richard Rorty.

Although I will treat these examples as if they fully describe the scope of analytic and continental epistemology, two examples do not cover the breadth of either family of games. My choice of examples will affect the picture of the game I present as well as the way translation will work. But my goal for this project is not to present a manual of translation capable of interpreting all analytic philosophy into the continental game or vice versa. I simply want to show that its possible in these cases. If we reason by analogy, success in this case makes it more likely that communication that it is possible and useful in other cases.

Because epistemologists are playing two different games, they cannot immediately evaluate the content of the other game. In order to make use of another game they must translate it into their own game and there are many ways to translate a theory. Quine, Wilson, and Davidson deal with this problem by using solution is the principle of charity.

Quine separates statements into an objective part and a subjective part. The objective part is caused externally by sensory stimuli and is available to all subjects. The subjective part on which Quine focuses consists of the logical laws which govern the interconnections between sentences. The subjective part is

meaningless unless "seen from within the theory complete with its posited reality" (24).

Each person's language is unique, since "no two of us learn our language alike" (13). We cannot enter another's head to experience another person's statements firsthand. Instead we translate their statements into something we can understand. But there are many possible interpretations: "manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another" (27).

When using the principle of charity, we first assume that the speaker is not deceptive, but believes what he says. Some of what the speaker says may seem false to a listener at first glance. The listener could ignore that speaker on the basis of this bad first impression. But as the old proverb says, we should not judge a book by its cover. The listener may miss out on all the positive things the strange theory has to offer. So the principle of charity has the listener assume that "assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language" (59).

When a listener understands a speaker, the listener does so by making sense of the speaker according to the rules of the listener's game. This is translation. The objective part of a statement does not allow leeway in interpretation. The subjective part does. According to Quine, the listener should follow the "principle of charity" when interpreting the subjective part of statements (59).

N. L. Wilson originally named and described this principle in "Substances Without Substrata" to help the listener decide what a speaker's word designates. According to Wilson's principle of charity, the word designates, "that individual [thing] which will make the largest number of Charles' statements true," where Charles is the speaker (532).

Quine uses the principle to govern the subjective part of translation, thus "a fair translation preserves logical laws" in the listeners language (59). This principle applies to everyday life when we try to understand other people in casual conversation. It also applies to "radical translations" involving a totally foreign language with which the listener has had no previous contact.

However, Quine's dual system makes translating theories difficult by focusing on individual statements and by drawing a sharp line between subjective and objective elements. Davidson introduces a modification which enables the listener to deal more effectively with theories. Rather than identifying the objective portion with sensory stimulation, Davidson identifies the objective part of a theory with "events and objects" of belief, the things that cause belief (131-2). This is an especially important modification for epistemological purposes since it may beg the question to presume that sensory stimulation is objective knowledge. The nature of the split between subjective and objective elements is part of the epistemology game. The nature of the relationship between sentences of a language also varies with the game. Thus the less specific description, "events and objects," is more useful. This description reveals the blurry line between the

objective and subjective parts of a theory. Acknowledging the blurriness allows Davidson to extend the principle of charity to cover the whole interpretation, no matter how distant from observation. Davidson's principle of charity tells us to "favor *interpretations* that as far as possible preserve truth" in the listener's language (*italics added*) (130). This means that we interpret a speaker holistically, in terms of his entire theory, not sentence by sentence. We may decide the speaker is wrong in a one area in order to find the speaker right in a more significant area.

Lehrer disagrees with the principle of charity in general, saying, "We may be in a position where it would be uncharitable or at least doxastically imperialistic to interpret the beliefs of another in such a way that they are mostly true" (133). He explains this assertion with an example in which a nominalist interprets a Platonist. Every statement the Platonist makes is formulated in Platonistic terms; the Platonist rejects every statement not formulated in Platonistic terms. According to Lehrer if the nominalist were to interpret the statements of the Platonist according to the principle of charity, the nominalist would have to interpret the Platonist as a nominalist. This would actually be uncharitable since it is not what the Platonist believes. For example, the Platonist believes that 'water exemplifies universal wetness.' This statement is wrong according to the nominalist's view. However, it would not be fair for the nominalist to interpret the Platonist as really meaning that 'this water is wet.' The Platonist rejects the

statement 'this water is wet' because it does not accurately convey exemplification.

Should this difference prevent the nominalist and the Platonist from building a dam together?

Lehrer's asks the nominalist to apply the principle of charity to each statement made by the Platonist. But this method overlooks the way the beliefs are enmeshed in a theory. This is part of the difference I noted between Quine and Davidson. We can view a theory as a collection of statements or as a whole. Davidson notes that his "methodology enforces a general presumption of truth for the body of beliefs as a whole, but the interpreter does not need to presume each particular belief of someone else is true" (133). If we take the holistic view, the nominalist does not need to interpret the Platonist as a nominalist. The nominalist can acknowledge that the Platonist is a Platonist, and that that aspect of his theory is wrong. Other aspects of his theory may be correct. When the Platonist says 'water exhibits universal wetness' the nominalist can disagree with the Platonistic elements but agree that there is something wettish about water.

In an extremely simplified case, the nominalist and the Platonist only disagree about the nature of universals and they can systematically interpret each other by altering statements about universals. Thus the nominalist judges the Platonist to be wrong in one area so that he can interpret the rest of the theory as true. In this way they can communicate, build dams, and otherwise find ways to coexist in harmony. Of course there may be quite a few differences between

theories which cannot be systematically reconciled. The best manual for translation may only be able to translate the theory so that a little bit is true. The principle of charity does not insist that there must be a translation in which most of the statements are true.

The following chapters explore the possibility of communication between analytic and continental epistemologists. Chapters II and III see what two examples show us about each family of games. Chapter IV proposes a way to interpret the continental accounts of knowledge from the perspective of the analytic theories. Chapter V suggests an interpretation of the analytic accounts of knowledge which gives it a legitimate place in the continental view of knowledge. Since two examples do not properly represent an entire field of study, the ideas found in these chapters are not intended as proof that all philosophers will find significant benefit in inter-family communication. The following ideas are better thought of as a pilot study for the use of the above strategy in epistemology.

CHAPTER II

THE ANALYTIC FAMILY OF GAMES

This chapter attempts to define the analytic family of epistemology games by reference to a coherence theory of knowledge given by Keith Lehrer in Theory of Knowledge, and a foundationalist theory of rationality explained by Richard Foley in The Theory of Epistemic Rationality.

2.1 A coherence theory

“The epistemologist asks what we know” (1). Specifically, Lehrer’s coherence theory studies knowledge in the information sense. Knowledge is not mere possession of information, but rests on our ability to distinguish truth from error. The goal for an analysis of knowledge is not to analyze epistemic words like ‘know’ or to present a theory of how people come to know things. The goal of the coherence theory is to explain “what conditions must be satisfied and how they may be satisfied in order for a person to know something” (5). Lehrer wants to fill in the blank at the end of this sentence: S knows that p if and only if _____. The answer to this question is useful for explaining how people know that “the input (the reports and representations) they receive from other people and their own senses is correct information rather than error and misinformation” (8).

Lehrer believes knowledge has a strong subjective character which limits it to the human in question, so he conceives of knowledge as the information a person is justified in accepting. Acceptance does not mean affirming any old proposition; we accept propositions for the goal of obtaining truth and avoiding error. This differentiates propositions we accept from propositions we affirm with the goal of feeling good, for aesthetic reasons, or for any other goal.

Justification requires background information. Lehrer presents a coherence theory of knowledge in which justification is explained in terms of coherence with a system. There are many possible systems with which a proposition may cohere. The general schema for acceptance of proposition *p* for subject *S* at time *t* is as follows: "S is justified in accepting that *p* at *t* if and only if *p* coheres with system *X* of *S* at *t*" (115).

Coherence is defined in terms of what is reasonable for person to accept into that system. Proposition *p* coheres with system *X* of *S* at *t* if and only if it is more reasonable for *S* to accept *p* than to accept any competing claim on the basis of system *X* of *S* at *t* (117).

The individual's standards concerning what is reasonable also determines which propositions act as competition. "C competes with *p* for *S* on system *X* at *t* if and only if it is less reasonable for *S* to accept that *p* on the assumption that *c* is true than on the assumption that *c* is false on the basis of the system *X* at *t*" (117-118).

Once c and p are in competition, p must beat or neutralize c for S to be personally justified in accepting that p . P beats c if and only if it is more reasonable to accept that p than to accept that c . Another proposition, n , can neutralize c if and only if it is more reasonable to accept the conjunction of n and c than it is to accept c alone and the conjunction of n and c does not compete with p .

The concept of reasonableness is left primitive. This is partly a nod to the normative aspect of justification and it also allows "for a plurality of factors to influence the normative evaluation" (127).

Lehrer explains the acceptance process through a game played between a claimant and a skeptic. The claimant tries to justify his acceptance of p in the context of system X at time t . The skeptic uses various competitors to show that the claimant is not justified in accepting that p . The claimant defends his claim p by attempting to beat and neutralize the competition. If the claimant is successful, then he is justified in accepting that p in the context of system X at time t .

The process that gets us to knowledge has many levels. It involves three acceptance systems and, hence, three types of justification: personal, complete, and undefeated justification. Each type of justification results in a different level of certainty that the individual has achieved her goal of obtaining truth and avoiding error.

Since knowledge concerns individual humans, knowledge claims must first be personally justified. This is the only type of justification an individual can

achieve by herself. System X for personal justification is the individual's acceptance system. All the beliefs a person accepts at any given time form that person's acceptance system at that time. The acceptance system changes over time as a person learns new things that cause her to accept new beliefs and discard old beliefs.

For the acceptance system to provide personal justification, the claimant must have some information that acceptance can achieve its goal of obtaining truth and avoiding error, that acceptance is a trustworthy guide to truth. Lehrer states this formally as the principle of trustworthiness which says, "whatever I accept with the objective of accepting something just in case it is true, I accept in a trustworthy manner" (122). The principle of trustworthiness also justifies the individual in accepting that personal justification leads to the next level of justification.

The next level of justification is complete justification. In this case, system X is the verific system. The verific system of a person is her acceptance system with all erroneous propositions deleted. The individual human cannot create his own verific system. This game requires an omniscient skeptic. Nonetheless, the principle of trustworthiness allows an individual who is personally justified in accepting statement p to believe that she is also completely justified in accepting statement p.

The final level of justification is undefeated justification. Undefeated justification uses an individual's ultra system. In this system, every false claim is

eliminated or replaced with its denial, and anything that logically implies the false claim is eliminated or replaced by its denial. Like complete justification, this game cannot be played by the individual alone. It cannot truly be played by any human as it requires a skeptic with perfect information. However, the game can be approximated with two or more people. For example, a friend with more information on a subject can play the skeptic for that subject in the undefeated justification game.

2.2 Subjective Foundationalism

Foley's variation of the epistemological game is concerned with rationality. He uses an Aristotelian conception of rationality, which is "one that understands rationality in terms of a person carefully deliberating about how to pursue his goals effectively and then acting accordingly" (5). Imagine a person who has goal G. Y is a potential means to G. It is rational for an individual to bring about Y if that individual believes that Y is an effective means to his goal, G. This kind of belief constitutes rationality. Foley wants to differentiate these beliefs from other kinds of beliefs held by an individual.

There are many types of rationality, and thus there are many different ways to describe what kind of belief is rational. Each type of rationality is defined by answers to two questions. The first question asks, 'What is the goal?' Goal X

may be a diachronic epistemological goal of having true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs over time; it may be a prudential goal of believing useful things. There are many possible goals for an individual. When evaluating the rationality of Y, the individual can assume a goal and ask if Y is rational given that goal; he can evaluate Y given a subset of his goals; or he can evaluate the goals themselves given a further goal, for example, the goal of achieving as many goals as possible.

The second question is, 'What is the perspective?' Standards for evaluating claims to rationality depend upon the perspective from which they are made. For example, standards which come from the perspective of the individual are likely to be different than the standards of the scientific community, the culture, an omniscient being, etc.

The answers to these two questions reveal the general type of rationality. The details of a theory of rationality will provide a way to determine whether or not the belief that 'Y is an effective means to goal G' is rational for an individual. We can give a meta-account of the rationality of belief which describes what any account of rationality must accomplish. Call the belief, 'that Y is an effective means to goal G,' p. Any theory of rational belief can then be phrased in the following form: "there is some important perspective P and some major goal G which that from perspective P S's believing p seems to be an effective (and nontrivial) means to goal G just in case S's belief p has characteristics _____" (139). If belief p has these characteristics, p is rational; if not, p is irrational.

Foley develops a particular theory of epistemic rationality. The goal of this kind of rationality is “now believing those propositions that are true and now not believing those propositions that are false” (8). Epistemic rationality takes the perspective of the individual. Thus the standards for evaluating an individual’s epistemic rationality are the individual’s deepest epistemic standards. These standards evaluate arguments which tend to support or defeat belief in the efficacy of means p for goal X . They determine whether or not the conclusion that ‘ p is an effective means to goal X ’ is uncontroversial for the individual. The deepest epistemic standards of an individual are reached through ideal reflection. That is, the individual reflects until her opinion stabilizes so that no amount of additional reflection would cause her to change her opinion.

Although these arguments can be formulated for any complex rational belief, the arguments must have basic propositions at their foundation. These basic beliefs are self-justifying, which means that according to the individual’s deepest epistemic standards, simply believing in p makes it sufficiently likely that p is true. These beliefs do not have to be true in fact; they must only be psychologically convincing. For example, a person might decide that believing propositions about psychological states is sufficient to make these propositions true. There can also be situations in which understanding a proposition makes it true. Analytic and definitional propositions are good candidates for this kind of basicality.

These basic propositions can then be assembled into arguments which are uncontroversial for an individual according to his deepest epistemic standards. Basic propositions can function as premises that imply a conclusion, p , or they can create an argument that makes p sufficiently likely to be true. The term, 'likely', in the second case, refers to a general subjective notion rather than an actual numerical probability. Although the content of a basic proposition is subjective, there are some objective constraints, such as consistency.

An argument that makes proposition p controversial is called a defeator. A defeator tends to make not p epistemically rational for the individual at that time. The individual must believe the propositions in the defeator's argument with at least as much confidence as he believes p . If the defeator d is not defeated by another argument, d^1 , then the defeator d makes p controversial.

It is epistemically rational for an individual to believe a proposition p at time t if p is basic or is the conclusion of an argument which has premises that are reducible to basic propositions and has no effective defeator.

To decide whether an argument is convincing, the individual must weigh her perception of the likelihood that the argument is true along with the benefits she sees in true belief and the risk she sees in false belief for each situation. This type of evaluation means that some propositions are believed with more confidence than other propositions. The amount of confidence with which she believes a proposition will determine how well it stands up against other arguments which tend to make the proposition controversial based on the

individuals epistemic situation. A person's epistemic situation is influenced by external constraints such as genetic makeup, the environment, and the concepts a culture uses.

2.3 What these examples reveal about the analytic game

The information covered in the examples presented by Foley and Lehrer provides clues as to the area covered by the analytic epistemology game. These analytic variants narrow the field to propositional knowledge. The main player in this game is an individual subject. The goal of this individual is to obtain true beliefs and avoid false beliefs now. The rules of the game explain how the individual can reach this goal. Each variation contains several rounds: Lehrer identifies three rounds with increasing levels of certainty. Foley allows for an indeterminate number of rounds by permitting the player to change perspectives. He also permits the player to change the goal, but that changes the game as well.

The rules of each game are objective, but the subject chooses the propositions which enter the game. Not all propositions reach the end of the game. Some are weeded out by the rules of the round; some are forced out by other propositions.

The individual is not expected to accomplish the actual process described by the game. The game merely decides what propositions would count toward the

individual's goal if she were to play the game. If the person does play the game she will not be able to decide on her own that her resulting beliefs are, in fact, true; she can only say that these beliefs are more reasonable than beliefs which did not successfully finish the game.

The games can be played with more than one player, but the main player is still the individual subject. In Lehrer's variation, for example, the subject can play the games with the role of the skeptic filled by another person or even a group of people such as the scientific community. In Foley's version, other individuals can be introduced by changing the perspective from that of the individual subject to that of another individual or group.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTINENTAL FAMILY OF GAMES

Continental philosophy takes a different approach to epistemology. I shall attempt to define this view with examples from Richard Rorty in contingency, irony and solidarity, and from Jean-Francois Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.

3.1 The liberal ironist

Rorty starts out his discussion of knowledge with a look at his conceptions of truth and language. He holds that there is no independent internal or external truth. External truth independent of a human is impossible because truth is a function of sentences, and "sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations" (5). Likewise there is no reliable guide to truth which is intrinsic to humanity. He agrees with Davidson that language is not a medium for representation or expression because there is no inner or outer truth for language to represent or express. Language is better described as a tool.

Rorty uses Wittgenstein to undermine the ideas that non-linguistic things called meanings exist, that there is a determinate relationship between self, reality, and language, and that the worth of a language depends on how well it fits

in this determinate relationship. Rather than conceive of language as a serious endeavor whose rules we are obligated to follow, we should view language as a game. Games and their associated vocabularies are different, not better. Thus selecting a vocabulary is like choosing a tool rather than fitting a piece into the puzzle of truth. On this view, the evolution of a language is not progress, it is simply redescription for a more useful tool for the present purpose.

Rorty describes language games within an individual as operating on two levels, public and private. The private game is the game of self knowledge. It is the language we use to describe ourselves and our context—other people and the world—to our private selves. In this game, we formulate what is called a “final vocabulary” for ourselves. This vocabulary is “ ‘final’ in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse” (73).

Rorty contrasts the private language games of common sense, metaphysics, and theory, with those of irony. Common sense takes for granted that statements formulated in the final vocabulary are sufficient. The individual of common sense deals only with the rules of one game. The metaphysician believes “that ‘reality,’ if properly asked, will help us determine what our final vocabulary should be” (75). She believes that we currently possess criteria which will lead to the right answer. The proper method for discovering right answers is the argument, which usually involves finding a paradox, resolving it, and placing the resolution back in the accepted language game. Knowledge is a collection of

propositions which are true, and converge on reality. For her, “‘the world’ names something we ought to respect as well as cope with, something personlike in that it has a preferred description of itself” (21). This picture of the world inclines her to say that ‘the truth is out there.’ The metaphysician has an insatiable urge to theorize, to describe something larger than herself which will settle her final vocabulary.

The ironist, however, “has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses,” knows that she cannot resolve those doubts with an argument from her current vocabulary, and does not think her vocabulary is closer to reality than others (73). She is a nominalist and a historicist. Each intellectual innovation gives her another set of words for self-description to be used along with other vocabularies formed in the past. The ironist believes that reflection is not governed by criteria and that knowledge from different sources does not converge, but maintains idiosyncratic paths. Current beliefs are the result of the contingencies of her past; rationality is merely a mechanism which adjusts contingencies to other contingencies. To her, knowledge does not come by grasping the truth of propositions, but with knowing how to grasp the function of sets of words. This kind of knowledge is the result of free discussion and is especially facilitated by literature. Free discussion is “the sort which goes on when the press, the judiciary, the elections, and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common, and peace and wealth have made possible the leisure necessary to listen to lots

of different people and think about what they say" (84). The ironist gains knowledge by acquainting herself with as many vocabularies as possible and by trying out new arrangements of these vocabularies.

This is not to say that ironists are superior. Freud showed us that all humans are constantly coming to grips with their final vocabulary. The thing that make ironists unique is that they make their project of self-description and redescription explicit. The ironist consciously forms his vocabulary using currently available vocabulary as the groundwork for innovations. Although the vocabulary a non-ironist uses is not unique, the way he uses it to describe himself is unique to the contingencies that formed his subconscious.

Ironists can still get in trouble, however, when they try to theorize like the metaphysician. The ironist theorist looks for a privileged perspective from which to describe herself and everyone else. The ironist's theory must be in narrative form because she cannot describe relationships to some independent truth. Instead she describes relationships to the past. However, to get a privileged perspective on history, the ironist theorist must assume that, through history, she can see all possible vocabularies. This is not possible. Her new vocabulary opens up new possibilities, making her vocabulary lose its privileged position.

This leads to Heidegger's dilemma: How do you redescribe metaphysics without becoming a metaphysician? The answer lies in Rorty's public/private split. You cannot try to invent a vocabulary for everyone. You must view your redescription as unique to yourself and not as a theory applicable to everyone.

Your redescription is simply the next move of the knowledge game for you and whomever else happens to find your description useful.

The public language game describes how we relate to other people. We cannot form stable relationships on the basis of a language because everyone has different vocabularies, making a universal ethical theory impossible. There is one thing we have in common, however. Animals have the capacity to feel pain. All humans have the capacity for a special kind of pain, the pain of humiliation. This common capacity is the source of solidarity between humans. The capacity for pain, rather than a vocabulary, forms the basis of public relationships. Rorty calls the type of person who is sympathetic to this capacity 'liberal.' He borrows Judith Schklar's definition of a liberal as a person who thinks "that cruelty is the worst thing we do" (xv).

A liberal accepts certain moral elements into her vocabulary. A moral subject is someone capable of being humiliated. A person is humiliated by having a language forced upon him or by having his language mocked. Thus a liberal will not force her language on another, nor will she take another's language away. Such practices are detrimental to society and the individual since truth comes from free discussions which cannot take place under force or threat of force. Literature plays an important role in morality by making us aware of cruelty and suffering.

Cruelty occurs on two levels. An individual can be cruel and society can be set up so that it is cruel. The first kind of cruelty is explored by Vladimir Nabokov, and the second by George Orwell.

One of the problems for a person combining liberalism and irony is that her pursuit of a personal vocabulary can cause suffering in other people.

Unfortunately, the public and private spheres of life are hard to integrate. Public and private needs create a tension that is not resolved by a new vocabulary.

Instead, we have to find a compromise which balances both needs. To do this, we need to understand how cruelty can exist in the way our private idiosyncrasies affects others. Books give us examples of how “particular sorts of people are cruel to other particular sorts of people” (141).

Rorty uses Nabokov as an example of an author who warns us of our cruelty to others. In Bleak House, Nabokov creates a character who realized that his actions affected other people, but did not care if he caused suffering. Lolita targeted the problem of incuriosity—not realizing or caring that your actions affect other people. By pointing out the suffering of a person, and comparing it to the indifference of another person, Nabokov sensitizes us to the suffering around us and to our potential for cruelty. Rorty and Nabokov suggest that we avoid cruelty by making time for other people's fantasies and by paying attention to what other people say. They may be trying to communicate their suffering.

In addition to individual actions, cruelty can also manifest in our social practices. Authors like George Orwell have a knack for redescribing current social practices at the right time so that cruelty comes to light. In 1984, Orwell redescribes Soviet Russia, sensitizing readers to excuses for cruelty used by that particular state. Orwell also describes what could happen in the future should we

remain insensitive to such cruelties. A person has no autonomy without freedom, and without freedom there can be no truth.

The worst cruelty described in 1984 occurs when O'Brien tortures Winston. The physical torture was cruel, of course, but the ultimate cruelty was to take away Winston's language. This is the worst way to exploit a person's capacity for pain and humiliation. Winston and others with no vocabulary must say, "there is no world in which I can picture myself as living, because there is no vocabulary in which I can tell a coherent story about myself" (179).

Inflicting cruelty is the worst thing a liberal can do. Living in someone else's vocabulary is the worst thing for an ironist. By avoiding both, the liberal ironist can take the next step in the evolution of knowledge.

3.2 Postmodern knowledge

"It is impossible to know what the state of knowledge is—in other words, the problems its development and distribution are facing today—without knowing something of the society with which it is situated" (13).

Given this view, it is not surprising that Lyotard develops his conception of knowledge characterized by a word used to describe a state of society:

"postmodern," which "designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts." Lyotard structures the history of knowledge to follow these transformations. Specifically, he looks at the way different states of culture legitimize their conceptions of knowledge.

First he provides a method to describe legitimization. This gives him a way to talk across the different states of knowledge. His method uses Wittgenstein's concept of language games. In his use of this concept, "each of the various categories of utterance [denotation, prescription, etc.] can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put" (10). This method is used with three provisos: 1) The rules of a game are not capable of making themselves legitimate, but are the result of a contract between players. 2) The game cannot be played without rules; if anyone changes a rule in any way, the game is changed; a move which violates a rule cannot be part of that game. 3) Every utterance is a move in some game. Language games are competitive.

Each move anticipates or reacts to an adversary, concrete or abstract. Language games are also a necessary component of a social bond, which is one reason why knowledge and society are so closely related.

Lyotard starts his history of knowledge with a description of customary knowledge. This state of knowledge is based on a consensus that constitutes the culture of a people. Its primary mode of transmission is the narrative. Each narrative has intrinsic rules that emphasize the performance of the narrative rather than its informational content. The different language games are woven together in the story, which usually describes positive or negative role models. The narrative is not legitimized by helping people remember the past. Rather, the narrative legitimizes the social bond through the act of recitation; since it is part of the social bond, it also legitimizes itself. The speaker, listener, and subject are all active participants in the transmission of knowledge, and all three are legitimized merely by participating in the narrative. The narrative is tolerant of science as a form of knowledge. Science, however, considers the narrative a lesser form of knowledge if it can be considered knowledge at all. Due to this imbalance, knowledge narrowed to specialize in the unique narrative of science.

Although scientific knowledge includes diverse areas of study, it uses only one language game, the game of denotation which is concerned with what is true. Unlike the customary narrative, scientific knowledge is not a direct component of the social bond. It is not legitimized through performance, by being reported. Although science is a game of denotation, its rules are prescriptive. The rules

must be in a different language, and this language is logic. Each area of science has a set of rules which decide when a given language may be accepted as scientific. For the game to be legitimate, the rules must be legitimate. The rules for each area of science set down by its logic are legitimized in a metanarrative which uses the natural language for its metalogical discourse. However, the metalanguage does not follow the criteria it describes for its languages: it is inconsistent. The rules of science cannot be determined by metalogical discussion. Rather the rules of science are evaluated, argued for and against, and are ultimately the subject of consensus within the scientific community. This results in "two different kinds of "progress" in knowledge: one corresponds to a new move (a new argument) within the established rules; the other, to the invention of new rules" (43). Both kinds of movement are made possible by evidence for that particular move, by proof.

Truth is thus legitimized by proof. If you can control the means of producing proof, you can control the direction of truth. If you sell truth, or the results of its application (technology), you can buy more means of producing proof. This closed system is power. It is in the interests of the person gaining power from a system to increase the productivity of the cycle. Thus scientific knowledge becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Knowledge is legitimized by the power it creates through its performance. Accordingly, research opportunities are justified by performance and information potential.

Likewise, education is a means to learn how to obtain information and how to arrange it in new ways.

The concept of performance in a closed system assumes that a system is stable and deterministic, allowing users to maximize the ration of output to input based on full knowledge of the current state of the system. However, science itself revealed that this assumption is impractical and impossible. It is impractical because "a complete definition of the initial state of a system . . . would require an expenditure of energy at least equivalent to that consumed by the system to be defined" (55). It is impossible because uncertainty and lack of control actually go up as accuracy increases. "The effective, singular statement (the token) that nature will produce is unpredictable. All that can be calculated is the probability that the statement will say one thing rather than another" (57).

This leads to postmodern science, in which scientists search for the limits of control. Postmodern science does not evolve along a continuous function according to its logical rules. It is a model of an open system. No one person could grasp all the rules of every area of science in order to tell a story about them. A statement is not legitimized by falling under a closed metanarrative, such as logic, but by paralogy. A statement is valuable if it generates more statements and other game rules. Paradoxes and dissension inspire new moves. Scientists try to understand why they cannot explain some things and to expand what is knowable.

Scientific knowledge, with its relatively narrow focus on one language game, can be a useful place to start when describing the legitimacy of knowledge. But language games other than the game of denotation are in need of legitimation. For Lyotard to describe all knowledge he must be able to transfer the strategy of legitimation used by postmodern science to other kinds of knowledge. Postmodern science is divided into little narratives which surround islands of determinism. It is legitimized by its ability to inspire new ideas, new moves in the language game, whose usefulness is often unrecognized until much later. He explains how this strategy of legitimation transfers to social knowledge and the social bond. Society, with all of its utterances, is even more complicated than science. Thus the next view of knowledge must recognize the "heteromorphous nature of language games" (66). As in science, the goal of dialogue in any language game is to inspire new ideas.

Some, like Habermas, have suggested that the goal of social dialogue is consensus among all constituents of a society. But universal agreement in any society is highly improbable without force, and force causes terror not consensus. Terror breaks the social bonds making games irrelevant. Thus social knowledge is not found in consensus, but in diversity. Any consensus concerning a language game must be local. "This orientation then favors a multiplicity of finite meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that concerns metaprescriptives and is limited in space and time" (66). Social interaction is evolving alongside knowledge in that temporary contracts are becoming common.

The individual is located at the intersection of various clouds of consensus. The self acts as a “post through which various kinds of messages pass” in various games (15). The individual has some power over these messages which pass through her post; the individual can also change her position in society to alter her interaction with messages. An individual increases her knowledge by increasing her competence in various language games.

3.3 What these examples reveal about the continental family of games

Continental philosophy described by these examples does not limit knowledge to a particular use, such as knowledge of a proposition, or at a particular time, *t*. Lyotard and Rorty believe that knowledge has many uses. Knowledge is part of the social bond. It is what the individual uses to describe himself. It can also describe the human relationship to the world. Each use requires a different tool. The substance of that tool is language. The tool is formed by selecting words and rules which will help the language express the desired knowledge.

Each use has a different goal and a different criterion of success. Thus knowledge does not have an intrinsic goal, but can be used for a goal if a person wants it to be so used. Truth is only one goal for knowledge, and denotation is only one form of knowledge. One form of knowledge, the narrative form, is of

interest to continental philosophers because it can incorporate all types of knowledge. This makes the narrative useful for describing the self and the social bond. Both philosophers recognize that the denotative and narrative forms of knowledge often clash. Rorty argues that the denotative form of knowledge along with certain types of narrative are insufficient tools for describing the self and the social bond. Lyotard agrees, saying, "the social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules" (40). Lyotard reconciles the narrative with the denotation game (science) by showing that in the postmodern society, denotation (science) is a special case of the narrative form.

The only sense in which knowledge qua knowledge reaches a goal is when new knowledge is different than old knowledge.

There is no privileged perspective from which to evaluate claims and uses of knowledge. Each individual has a unique perspective. Individuals can agree to take on a perspective, but that agreement is subject to change. Forcing someone to take on a perspective, to use language in a certain way, is an act of terror and causes humiliation.

CHAPTER IV

CONTINENTAL EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHER

In chapter II we saw that analytic epistemology looks for characteristics of knowledge relevant to every person. These characteristics do not depend on changing influences like social conditions or personal dispositions. The continental studies can seem like a lighter version of philosophy from this perspective because their subject matter is not as absolute; they do not have the goal of being basic and unchanging.

Continental philosophers describe the way people can and do use knowledge. This depends on various changing conditions. Indeed, the continental philosophers described in this project do not believe their ideas will always be right or appropriate; they describe transient phenomena and suggest further ideas of the same type. The analytic philosophers, on the other hand, try to look past the aspects of knowledge which change.

Since continental philosophers approach knowledge through the path of use, it makes sense for them to think of knowledge as a kind of ability, and to study the kind of competence required for an individual to use knowledge. Analytic philosophers can agree that a human who knows that p displays a kind of competence, namely an ability to distinguish truth from error. This ability is especially important because it plays a role in so many other types of competence, from practicing law to engaging in commerce to scientific endeavor.

While analytic philosophers can agree that the ability to use knowledge requires a certain kind of competence, they choose to focus on a different aspect of knowledge. They look at the beliefs that comprise knowledge for an individual

and ask what makes those beliefs different than other beliefs held by an individual. They develop criteria to differentiate these beliefs from other beliefs, criteria which answers this question: "What conditions must be satisfied and how they may be satisfied in order for a person to know something" in the information sense (Lehrer 5).

The analytic philosophers must fault continental philosophers for under-emphasizing the role of the world in questions of knowledge. They must conclude that Rorty is wrong in that he totally discounts the importance of objective truth in knowledge. They disagree with Rorty when he says that "the world causes us to be justified in believing a sentence true" is a mere platitude (Rorty 5). There is an external world upon which the truth or falsity of some sentences depend. Although knowledge has a subjective "soul," it requires a "body of truth" (Lehrer 150).

Although analytic and continental epistemology emphasize different things, continental epistemology contains ideas relevant to analytic epistemology. The descriptions of the social character of knowledge by continental philosophers are useful because they identify factors that influence the individual's epistemic situation. Society can influence the individual's epistemic standards and it regulates the information to which an individual can give or withhold assent. Continental epistemology also describes potential ways to fill out the content of the analytic theories by presenting views which can serve in the role of the subject or the skeptic.

Implementing analytic theories in hypothetical scenarios is helpful in exploring possible implications of the analytic theories. For instance, it can help the analytic philosopher explore questions like, 'does this criteria allow relativists to have knowledge?' or 'is a relativist necessarily a skeptic?' and so on. To see how this might work, I will propose a possible way to translate Rorty's liberal ironism into the form of subjective foundationalism.

The liberal ironist believes that his deepest epistemic standards are contingent upon his unique history and that other people have different standards appropriate to the contingencies of their existence. Does this relativism make the liberal ironist a skeptic? It may appear so.

Foley gives a discussion of cultural relativism in which he suggests that relativism may give an individual "a reason to be suspicious of arguments that otherwise would be uncontroversial for him, given that his opinion of these arguments (and what he would think of them were he to be reflective) has been culturally influenced and given that he realizes this." Does this potential suspicion mean that relativism leads to skepticism?

Rorty's liberal ironism escapes complete skepticism by emphasizing the role of the individual in *creating* truth. An individual's basic beliefs are those in which the individual's belief in them makes them sufficiently likely to be true. Foley suggests that sensory stimulation and memory are good candidates for that category. But these things are not totally objective; they are filtered by various conscious and unconscious mechanisms. This leads Rorty to count the results of

these mechanisms and other like mechanisms as basic. The results of these mechanisms are descriptions of the self and the world. As basic beliefs, these descriptions can be used as premises in other arguments.

The contingency of epistemic standards means that a liberal ironist cannot expect others to share his standards, namely his description of the self and the world. Nonetheless, relativism does not mean that deep epistemic standards are incapable of justifying claims to epistemic rationality. These standards can still determine whether an argument is uncontroversial for such an individual. Interpreting Rorty's liberal ironism from the perspective of subjective foundationalism shows us that an epistemically rational relativist is not necessarily a skeptic.

Rorty is valuable for Lehrer in the role of the skeptic. Rorty challenges moves in the justification games which depend on a special connection between words and the world and as well as moves which depend on an intrinsic nature of the self.

Although analytic theories describe knowledge in the individual person, each person is part of society and is affected by the social bond. Lyotard describes the social conditions that are likely to influence the kind of arguments an individual considers uncontroversial and her standards of reasonableness. The conditions pertinent to the analytic game are found in Lyotard's description of science, since his scientific standards apply to sentences which are true or false. In the modern past, the constituents of society were conditioned to accept

statements that fit into a grand narrative or statements that contributed to the productivity of a system. The postmodern society teaches its constituents that their epistemic standards apply to limited areas and are subject to change.

Postmodern society is especially interested in new arguments and new ways of making arguments. This may influence the individual to see new arguments as having more benefits if true. This grants extra weight to the potential benefits of a fruitful argument, making it easier for a new argument to be uncontroversial for a individual.

Social institutions also affect the individuals epistemic situation. They regulate access to the propositions available for evaluation and available to be part of an individual's belief system. Understanding how such social institutions work helps us evaluate the truth of the propositions they produce.

Both continental epistemologists discuss the role of the narrative in knowledge. Narrative forms such as literature, along with other media, model epistemic standards and try to convince individual's to accept certain propositions.

CHAPTER V

ANALYTIC EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHER

At first glance it appears that continental philosophers may need to relegate analytic philosophy to a historical role in which it is the result of a modern world view which thinks that truth is a puzzle and the goal of epistemologists is to put together their set of pieces so that it matches the picture on the box. A continental philosopher who interpreted analytic thought in this way would reject it as outdated and would find very little use for analytic philosophy today.

This is not a very charitable interpretation of analytic philosophy. I propose a different interpretation which gives analytic philosophy more credibility in the continental family of knowledge games. Analytic philosophy can be interpreted as a field in Lyotard's postmodern science. In Rorty's terms, analytic philosophy looks like metaphysics, but it can be "sociologized" so that it gains a "respectable ironist sense" (83).

In the continental view, analytic epistemology does not cover every aspect of knowledge. In fact, it limits itself to a very narrow field within knowledge. Lyotard identifies different types of knowledge with different types of competency in different language games (e.g. know-that, various know-how games, technical competence, etc.). Foley's conception of rationality parallels these distinctions. He identifies two criteria for indexing games, the perspective from which the game is played and the goal of the game. He is interested in the game of epistemic

rationality, where the goal is “*now* believing those propositions that are true and *now* not believing those propositions that are false” (8), and success is evaluated from the perspective of the individual. Both he and Lehrer are concerned with the game of “knowledge in the information sense” (Lehrer 4). In other words, analytic epistemology is concerned with denotative sentences. Lyotard calls this type of knowledge ‘learning’ and ‘science.’ “Learning is the set of statements which, to the exclusion of all other statements, denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false. Science is a subset of learning” (18). Analytic epistemology is a legitimate part of knowledge for Lyotard if it can fit the model of postmodern science.

Lyotard’s postmodern science is characterized by paralogy and a flexible localized consensus. Scientists search for the limits of understanding. Analytic epistemologists try to understand and define human knowledge of denotative propositions. This understanding is subject to limitations. Each definition can only claim to encapsulate knowledge to a limited degree of certainty. We can only draw a line between what is and what is not knowledge of the denotative type to a certain degree of precision, and the degree of precision depends on the variant of the game played.

Lehrer, for example, identifies three levels of certainty with his three justification games. Complete certainty is only found in the ultra justification game. This game can never actually be played in full because the skeptic requires access to more information than is humanly possible. The ultra

justification game can only be approximated through human dialogue. Thus Lehrer locates the limit of human knowledge of the 'learning' type somewhere between personal justification and ultra justification.

Foley's description of rationality allows for infinite variety in types of rationality and thus in types of certainty as well. Foley proposes a way to circumscribe beliefs which are epistemically rationality for an individual. An individual's understanding of his own rationality is limited by the amount of time he spends reflecting on his deepest epistemic standards. The longer he reflects, the lower the chance he will change his evaluation of the acceptability of a belief becomes, bringing him closer to identifying his own brand of epistemic rationality.

Postmodern scientific progress is not a continuous function, and analytic theories do not present themselves as a continuous line of progress in epistemology. They do not, for example, show that epistemology is converging on one right way to circumscribe knowledge. Both Lehrer and Foley examine similar evidence and attempt to resolve many of the same paradoxes, which gives their theories many similarities. Nonetheless, the resulting theories are structured differently, providing different answers to the paradoxes and suggesting different moves in the analytic game. Foley emphasizes rationality over knowledge and relies on basic propositions rather than consistency. Lehrer, on the other hand, tries to balance internal and external requirements for knowledge. He gives priority to the internal requirement of coherence.

Lyotard would say that their statements are valuable not because they may lead the way to the 'right' answer but because they generate more statements and other game rules. The theories described in these books have spawned more moves and rules by the authors and by the readers. One of the more powerful analytic moves is the paradox, in which a philosopher discovers apparent inconsistencies resulting from the particular limit of knowledge described in a theory. Many new rules and moves are suggested to overcome the paradox. Analytic epistemology can thus be viewed as an open system. It is not legitimized by participating in a metanarrative, but by producing new moves and rules in a game.

This interpretive move from metanarrative to paralogy is important because it allows analytic philosophy to duck under Rorty's charges of metaphysicalism. The metaphysician tries to find a theory that can encapsulate all the complexity of life and its changing conditions. But real life is not as deterministic as a theory suggests. Description, of the self and of others, "is a task not for a theory," but for some form of the narrative (Rorty xvi). Analytic philosophy must become sociologized into ironism (Rorty 83) by understanding the analytic word 'theory' not as a metaphysical theory, but as a little narrative.

Rorty must disagree with a literal interpretation of the aspect of analytic methodology which suggests that "we begin with commonsense and scientific assumptions about what is real and what is known" (Lehrer 2). However, he can 'sociologize' this methodology by interpreting commonsense as the things which

make sense to a person or group of people given their contingencies and by understanding science as a historically contingent enterprise.

Rorty believes that the self has no intrinsic nature, and "if there is no center to the self, then there are only different ways of weaving new candidates for belief and desire into antecedently existing webs of belief and desire" (84). Must we interpret analytic philosophers as assuming that the human self has an intrinsic nature? This would only be necessary if analytic philosophers believe that standards of reasonableness and deep epistemic standards are the same, or at least very similar for each individual because they are based on some kind of intrinsic nature. Although Rorty and Foley think people are similar, they do not need to be interpreted as assuming the self has an intrinsic nature. Both of their descriptions of internal standards allow for different views. It is not unreasonable from the continental perspective to think that people will have similar views on what is reasonable or uncontroversial since people are subject to many of the same contingencies, such as basic needs, sensory stimulation, social interaction, which make it probable that their descriptions will converge in significant ways.

No one analytic theory will ever be 'right' in the sense that it describes the real nature of knowledge for all people. Rather, continental philosophers can view the analytic vocabulary as a contingently existing way to use words voluntarily accepted by a large number of people as a philosophical tool. Descriptions forged with this tool can be used by those people to describe themselves and are

available for other people, outside the circle of analytic philosophers, to add to their final vocabulary or to ignore as they see fit.

Herein lies the value of analytic philosophy from Rorty's perspective: analytic philosophy provides one more vocabulary from which a person can draw to describe herself and her world. Both continental philosophers can find value in analytic philosophy as another way of producing new ideas, new words and new ways to use them.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

What is talk about knowledge supposed to do for us? Should it help us understand ourselves better? Should an analysis of knowledge serve to justify an individual's claims to knowledge? Should such discussion help us understand why a given society permits us to say we know some things but not others and determine what this culture should permit us to say we know or don't know? These are all interesting questions, deserving of serious discussion.

Thoughts are not formulated in a vacuum. Any study of the individual must take place with the understanding of that individual's context, of society and the contingencies of her history. However, an individual's knowledge is not identical to those contingencies. Identifying specific influences on knowledge does not tell us what a person can say she knows to be true.

When studying an object, it is useful to view it in different ways. "You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about" (Wittgenstein 82). Analytic and continental philosophers use different paths to approach the study of knowledge. This results in different ways to define knowledge.

Is one definition better than another? The answer to that question depends on the path you take. Choosing a path does not entail isolation from other hikers. The view from another path may reveal interesting things about your own path.

This intent of this project was to show that philosophers using the analytic and continental approaches to knowledge need not proceed in isolation.

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